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TARA FINDS *the* DOOR *to* HAPPINESS

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TARA FINDS *the* DOOR *to* HAPPINESS

Characters

TARA
MARYAM
SHERIFA } Moslem Indian girls of Junior age

SELEM: Moslem Indian boy, Junior age, brother of Tara

JONSING
JOBANG } Hindu boys

LOCKI
SITA } Hindu child widows

RUNABAI: Hindu girl of low caste (not a speaking part)

TARA'S MOTHER

AYESHA: Older Moslem girl, wife of Tara's eldest brother

MISS SANSOM: Young American woman, the mission school teacher

All but the three last mentioned are of Junior age, and even they may be represented by tall Junior girls, unless it be thought desirable to use that number of older girls or young women in the play.

Word List

Pring walo: very early in the morning; literally "in the night of the morning." Village mission schools often have to convene from five to eight o'clock in the evening in order to draw pupils, as the parents will not allow them to leave their tasks at any other time

Koran: the sacred book of the Moslem religion

Memsahib (Mem-sa-heeb) : the name given by the people of India to European and English-speaking women

Purdah: the curtain that shuts the women away from the rest of the house and from the world

Zenana: the women's quarters, in India

Kabaddi: an active running game played by the children of India

Purdah nashin (na-sheen') : dwellers behind the purdah; women of high caste who never leave the privacy of their apartments, except rarely in equally private curtained vehicles

Neem: one of India's most beautiful flowering trees

Burkha: the voluminous white outer garment that covers a Moslem woman from the top of her head to her toes when she emerges from the zenana; it has openings for eyes and sometimes for breathing

Sweeper: a member of one of the outcaste groups whose work is to perform menial tasks in the houses of the caste people

Anna: a small coin of India, equal to a little more than two cents of our money

Costumes

TARA, MARYAM, and SHERIFA: full-sleeved, bright dresses, opening in the front and reaching the knees; worn under these dresses, colored trousers, gathered at the ankle; heelless mules or plain slippers; small, round, bright caps. In this part of India the hair is parted in the middle, braided in many small braids, and these braids fastened together with yarn at the ends, and the yarn braided into one braid and fastened with a tassel. In the second scene, in the zenana, Tara's trousers and cap should be omitted. Bracelets and anklets may be worn.

TARA'S MOTHER, and AYESHA: costumes like those above, with the addition of colored veils, three yards long and a yard and a half wide, worn over the head and thrown over the left shoulder; an abundance of necklaces, bracelets, and other jewelry.

LOCKI, SITA, and RUNABAI: saris worn over the ordinary dresses, and tan stockings to simulate bare feet. For Locki's sari use a strip of gay cheese-cloth, or other colored material, a yard wide and eight yards long; for Runabai's, a duller color; for Sita's, unbleached muslin. Wrap it once around the hips and fasten it firmly in the center at the waistline; then wrap it around once more, so that it forms a straight narrow skirt. Pleat the upper edge of the next few yards in your hands, and tuck the pleated edge in over the upper edge of the "skirt" at the center front (you will probably need to pin it securely, though the Hindu manages nicely without). Pass the remaining end over the left hip, across the back and under the right arm, across the chest, over the left shoulder, and over the head. Locki should wear some necklaces, bracelets, anklets, and rings, and a jeweled headband will add to the effect; Runabai will wear a few bracelets; and Sita, none at all. The hair of Locki and Runabai should show a center parting. All these girls,

and the mother and Ayesha, may keep their saris over their heads, and, thus partly concealed, the hair will not be so difficult to manage.

SELEM: trousers, preferably of calico and fitted down at the ankle; a loose shirt over them; bare feet; a small, close red cap, or a turban.

JONSING and JOBANG: a cloth wrapped around the body much as a girl's sari is wrapped, but without the loose end over the shoulders and head; a loose white shirt over it; bare feet; cap or turban.

MISS SANSOM: ordinary American dress.

Scenes and Accessories

First scene: a village street. It may be better to leave the background of this scene entirely to the imagination, having it played in the narrow space in front of the curtains. If a more elaborate setting is desired, a screen may be painted to represent square mud huts with high thatched roofs, and blue sky or the green of trees showing between. Such a screen could be made by cutting and pasting colored paper in the style of the cut-out posters popular at present.

Second scene: a Moslem zenana. A floor-cloth of canvas will simulate a dirt floor fairly well. Necessary accessories are: a few ragged small mats or rugs and two or three dingy cushions; some quilts, and perhaps some matting, rolled up in a corner; a rude stove formed of three or four bricks set together and supporting a cooking-pot; a curtain of burlap or sacking at one side.

Third scene: a village mission school. A plain table with a low chair; books and an American doll on the table; a picture of Christ on the wall, with other colored Bible pictures; windows indicated by fresh, dainty curtains; a phonograph; a canary; mats in a circle on the floor.

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SCENE ONE: STREET IN A NORTH INDIAN VILLAGE

Sita runs across the front of the stage as if in terror, and crouches at the far end of it, covering her head with her arms. Jobang, Jonsing, Selem, Tara and Locki come hurrying after her.

LOCKI: What's the matter? Why are they chasing her?

TARA: Oh, they're only teasing. And they've taken away all her pretty things, too.

LOCKI: (*Pushing past the boys and standing between them and Sita*) Don't hurt her, boys! Please don't!

JONSING: Why not? She's a widow, isn't she?

JOBANG: Widows needn't expect anything better, the wretched creatures.

JONSING: Yes, probably if it weren't for her, her husband would still be alive.

TARA: I'd like to know what poor Sita had to do with it. Why, her husband lived in another village. You had hardly even seen him, had you, Sita?

SITA: (*Uncovering her face and looking up at them*) Yes —yes, I saw him once, the day I was married to him. But that was when I was four years old, and I've forgotten even what he looked like. All I remember is that he was a cross old man, and he scowled at me when I wanted to run out and play during our wedding—and slapped me; I remember that. I was glad when he went away to his own home.

JOBANG: When did he die?

SITA: Just the other day. Cholera. But they say it was all my fault, and they've taken away my pretty clothes

and my bracelets, so that everybody can see how bad I am. They beat me, too. I don't see why.

JONSING: Well, of course it was your fault! If you hadn't committed some sin, he wouldn't have got the cholera. That's what they all say.

SITA: But I've been good. Just as good as anyone else, anyway.

JOBANG: If it wasn't in this life, then it was in some other. Anyway, everybody knows widows can't be treated like decent people.

SELEM: We Moslems don't believe that.

JONSING: Oh, you Moslems! I guess you're the only ones that are so silly.

LOCKI: Oh, no, they aren't! The foreign people are just as good to widows as to anyone else.

JONSING: Pooh! You're nothing but a girl. What do you know about the foreigners?

LOCKI: (*Proudly*) I know much about them! Every day I go to their school—I go *pring walo*, in the dark of the morning. And though I've only begun, already am I learning to read and to write and—oh, to do ever so many things. It is a place of very great happiness.

SELEM: Who ever heard of a girl's learning so much? Girls are no better than cows. You're just making it all up.

LOCKI: (*Holding out a scrap-book she has been carrying*) See if I'm making it up! Here's my name on the front —"Locki." With my own hand I wrote it. (*Children peer at it in awe.*) And if only I had my primer book here, I could tell you all about how the little red hen found a seed. The letters talk it to me as loud and plain as the speaking of your voice.

SELEM: Let's see what's inside of that.

LOCKI: (*Opening the book reluctantly*) Yes, but don't touch, for the street itself is not blacker than your fingers. I will turn the pages. (*She turns them slowly.*

while they press round her and look, with wide open mouths.)

JOBANG: I never saw a book with pictures like that—pictures like life. Where did it come from?

LOCKI: Girls sent it to me from beyond the sea.

TARA: Well, what did they do that for?

LOCKI: I don't know, exactly. Only they're Jesus girls, and Jesus people do strange things. They treat everyone as a mother treats her first-born son—honestly they do. Even widows, like Sita—and me.

JOBANG: (*Jeeringly*) Oh, you'll find out! When you get to be twelve, and have your head shaved and your jewels taken away, then those foreigners will stone you from their doors as you would stone a pig.

LOCKI: (*Earnestly*) No, they will love me all the more, because they will be so sorry for me. They never close the door to happiness.

SITA: But there is no happiness for me—not for ages and ages and ages.

SELEM: What is this picture? Are these girls? They have short hair and they are playing ball, but they look like girls.

LOCKI: They really are girls. In America, across the sea, girls play. Even big girls, old enough to be married and have a dozen children; girls twenty years old! (*All the children look amazed.*) Why, we play games even in the little school here, and in the garden behind it, the garden with the high wall; and the teacher lady plays with us.

SELEM: What is this room for?

LOCKI: That's the place for the preparation of food. They call it "kitchen." Would you ever guess that the shiny blue and white thing on long legs is a stove? And I'll tell you something else: the smoke from that stove—well, there isn't any!

They all stare at her, shaking their heads doubtingly.

JOBANG: (*Aside to Jonsing*) If she didn't have the pictures, I'd know she was making it up!

LOCKI: And the Memsahib says the reason so many of our people have the bad sickness of the eyes is because the smoke from our cooking runs round and round our houses, seeking a way to get out, and goes into our eyes instead, to make us blind.

SITA: (*Enviously*) See how wise she is, this Locki who only yesterday knew no more than you or I! And she only a girl, and a widow, besides. But they would never take me? Surely, Locki, they would never open the door of happiness to me?

LOCKI: Maybe they would. I think they open the sooner for widows, because it is so cold and so dreary for us outside.

TARA: (*Piteously*) It's almost as bad for a Moslem girl, when she gets to be eleven. Do you know what my mother says? She says my father is going to put me behind the purdah now—because today is my eleventh birthday and I'm grown up. Oh, you don't know what it means to have to stay behind the purdah at our house! To live always in those two little, little rooms-of-the-women, and never get outdoors to play—

SELEM: (*Giving her a little shake*) Hush! Girls haven't any right to expect more than that. It's the way of the world and the will of Allah. Allah be praised that I am a boy! (*More gently*) Hush, little sister! (*Turning to Locki*) I don't see myself why they shouldn't take Tara in that school as well as you. Tara's not so stupid —for a girl. I guess if any woman can learn the reading and writing, my sister can.

LOCKI: Well, maybe; there are Moslem girls, too.

VOICE: (*From behind the curtains*) Tara! Tara! Come quickly. Your father desires your presence at once.

TARA: (*Looking frantically this way and that*) Oh, I don't want to go! I don't want to!

LOCKI: (*Pressing the scrap-book to her breast and then holding it out to Tara*) You may take my beautiful book —for just a little while, a little, little while. If you have to stay in the house all the time, you will have the pictures to look at.

Tara seizes the book, holds it close, smiles, and goes off stage to right, while Locki calls after her.

LOCKI: You'll wash your hands before you turn the pages, Tara? And you'll be very, very careful?

SCENE TWO: MOSLEM ZENANA IN NORTHERN INDIA

When curtain rises, Tara's mother is seen reclining in oriental fashion on the floor, elbow on cushion, looking at the scrap-book. Ayesha is sitting cross-legged and diligently blackening her eyebrows and lashes. Tara is peering through the opening of the curtain at the side of the stage.

TARA: (*Turning toward Mother*) But Mother, I want to go out with the other children! Lela is still playing. (*Looking out again*) They're playing Kabaddi. Ooh! Hurry, Lela! Hurry! Hurry! (*She turns again to her mother, pleadingly.*) Lela's still out; why shouldn't I be?

MOTHER: Lela's a year younger than you, my daughter. Your father says it's a disgrace for you to be running the streets, now that you are such a great girl.

TARA: (*Crouching, to make herself seem smaller*) But Mother, I'm not so big. I don't want to be a woman yet. Oh, Mother! Let me be a little girl, yet a while longer!

MOTHER: Ah, my poor little one, if only I could!

AYESHA: We'd all be glad enough to be little again, foolish child. Certainly nobody would ever choose to be a woman—in India.

TARA (*Turning from the curtain and picking up a little roll of rags, which she cuddles and croons over, as a doll*) But, Mother, Father doesn't really mean that I'm never to go out of this house again? Never?

MOTHER: (*Solemnly*) Until you go to the house of your husband, my child—probably never. We are poor, but we are not low outcastes, we are purdah *nashin.*

TARA: (*Wildly*) But what am I to do?

AYESHA: Do what the rest of us must do—nothing. Rise in the morning and eat and comb your hair and paint your eyebrows and your cheeks; and eat again when it is the time; and walk up and down the room; and rest and dream; and eat when it is time for eating; and go to bed. And wish, wish, wish, all the time, that you were a country woman who might sometimes look upon the trees and let the *neem* blossoms float down on her head, and be free!

TARA: Oh, I can't stand that! I'm only—why, I'm only a little girl. Really, Mother, I'm only a little girl! I've been shut up here just one day, and I can't stand the long, long days ahead.

MOTHER: Poor little Light-of-the-Moon! Look upon your mother, Child. She has not stepped outside the wall of the zenana but thrice in the twenty years since she was brought here a bride. We learn to stand it. Ah, we learn too well, do we not, Ayesha, wife-of-my-son? The zest of life droops within us. Even you would not today walk willingly beyond the shadows of your dwelling, for all your wild talk of *neem* trees.

TARA: Mother, if I could only read! If I could but write, Mother! If I had more books like this one! Then there would be something to do, something to think of.

MOTHER: Yes, to be sure; but reading and writing are not for us. We women have hardly so much mind as the cattle of the field. Never have I known a woman who could read. Except of course the memsahibs; they do say that all the memsahibs read and write and have the brains of men.

TARA: But, Mother, Locki is learning, too. Already she can read of birds and flowers and hens, and write her name in printing like the pictures.

AYESHA: Locki? She is making sport of you!

TARA: No, truly. If you will look at the cover of the book you will see her name. She made it herself. It

says "Locki" to all who have understanding. She learns at the little school the American women have for the girls.

MOTHER: (*Hastily*) There is no God but God, and Mohammed is his prophet! Children like you had better not talk so freely of the school of the English infidels. Bold women! Through the curtain I have seen them, walking the public street with their faces revealed to every passerby.

AYESHA: (*Sullenly*) I wish I were one of them!

TARA: Truly, they don't teach Locki any wickedness, Mother. She's nicer than she used to be. I don't know but she's even nicer than I am—and kinder. And the cleanness of her hands! Why, even her finger-nails must be as white as the new moon. And she won't sing the ugly songs any more.

MOTHER: (*Thoughtfully turning the pages of the scrapbook*) To be sure, I was astonished at your father. I showed him the book, and he looked long at these bold-faced girls that play the ball. I asked him if they were not a sad spectacle beside our maidens who hide their faces from all the world; and lo, your father said they did not look so very bold, but happy, as a father would like to see his daughters if it were according to the law of Mohammed. And the houses, he said, they were too much like Paradise to be anything in this world. Do they do anything else in that school, besides learning to read and write and know the wide world?

TARA: Oh, yes! It is very wonderful! They sing songs. (*She hums the air of a hymn.*) And the teacher woman calls music out of a box to sing with them. And they have pictures and pictures and pictures, red and yellow and blue, like these. When you're good and don't say the swearing words, you maybe get one to keep for your own.

AYESHA: I'd like that myself, even though I am seventeen. Do they do anything more?

TARA: Embroidery and sewing—but I don't care much for that. And lace. What I would like is the stories the teacher woman tells them, stories without an end, and none to make you fear to go to bed at night. And they have a golden bird in a golden cage, Locki says. And there are dolls with real hair on their heads, and eyes that move; each girl may undress one and dress it, if she is good. And the stories, Mother! If I were to go to that school I could tell you all the stories, when I came home, and—

MOTHER: You go to school? What crazy talk!

TARA: If Locki goes, why shouldn't I?

MOTHER: I've heard it whispered that Locki's household has been poisoned with this foreign religion; they are almost Christians themselves, thrice-accursed ones. Strange, though, that even the Christians would bother with Locki. I didn't suppose that anyone would take any trouble for a Hindu widow.

AYESHA: Are there any Moslems in the school, Tara?

TARA: (*Triumphantly*) There are! Maryam and Sherifa and more—as many as the fingers on my two hands, Locki says.

MOTHER: I should love to know what that foreign woman's hair is like when her hat is off. And whether they really wear their shoes in the house, as I have heard.

AYESHA: And whether it's true about the singing box; probably it's only a fairy tale. It would certainly pass the heavy hours if she could tell us stories and sing us new songs. And—I would like the embroidery.

MOTHER: But what man would marry a girl who could read and write like a boy? Tara is not yet even betrothed, and we must do nothing that might keep her from marrying well.

VOICE OF SELEM: (*Through the curtain*) I, Selem, am one who would marry a reading-and-writing-girl, and that gladly. So would Moosa! It would be much bet-

ter than having the women of your zenana know nothing to talk of but clothes and jewels and gossip.

MOTHER: My son! Shame upon you, listening there at the curtain! And what do you and Moosa know of it, anyway?

SELEM: And he vows that at least one of his wives is to be a girl that has gone to the school, so that she can tell him stories and amuse him, and keep the other women and the children in a better humor. My father says his words are wise, for it is becoming well known that the educated women carry sunshine with them, instead of the thunder-storms most wives wear on their brows.

MOTHER: Go about your play, my son, and leave off your eavesdropping and shameless chatter. Whatever is coming over our lords the men in these strange times? Perhaps better days are dawning for us womenfolk.

TARA: (*Clutching her mother's hand and pressing it to her face*) Mother! Will you ask my father? Will you beg him and tease him to let me go? I'll be much better. I won't coax to play in the street. I won't pinch the baby when I have to hold him. I'll tell you all the stories. I'll tell you what the teacher says every single day—every least word of it. I'll tell you what she wears.

MOTHER: Hush, hush, thou chatterbox! You deafen my ears. Yes, I'll ask your father—though I warn you my words may have no more weight than thistledown on a wall of stone.

TARA: Oh, Mother, Mother, Mother! If you ask him long enough and hard enough, I know he'll let me go. (*She whirls round wildly*). To school! To school!

SCENE THREE: MISSION SCHOOLROOM

Miss Sansom is at desk. Maryam, Sherifa, and Runabai are sitting on mats on the floor, Maryam and Sherifa embroidering, Runabai apparently making letters on a slate or with a brush on a piece of white board. Locki enters, ushering in Tara's mother, Ayesha, Tara, and Sita. The Moslem woman and girls carry each a sheet folded loosely over her arm, to suggest the burkha she has presumably worn through the streets. All gaze about the room with the liveliest curiosity. Miss Sansom rises and approaches them.

LOCKI: Miss Teacher, good day! I have brought visitors.

MISS SANSOM: How do you do? How do you do, Locki? We missed you at school today. Lessons are finished and all the children have gone except these few.

LOCKI: Tara and her mother and Ayesha must needs come in a cart—because they are purdah *nashin,* you know. Sita and I have waited long outside the door, and they have but just come.

TARA'S MOTHER: The fingers tremble with eagerness and are clumsy at their tasks, Memsahib, when one has not seen the world for many moons.

MISS SANSOM: (*Indicating mats on the floor*) Will you be seated?

Mother and Ayesha sit down.

TARA: (*In a loud whisper, pointing in amazement at Runabai*) Isn't that a sweeper girl in the very room with you Brahmins? How does she dare?

All stare.

LOCKI: Hush, Tara! We don't have caste here; it is left

outside the door when we enter. (*She runs over to Runabai and slips an arm round her shoulder, caressing her lightly.*) See! It didn't hurt me, even if I am Brahmin. Before I came to school I'd have thought it would cast me into the bottomless pit. I guess—I guess it's Jesus that makes the difference. (*She points to picture of Jesus.*) He loves everybody, and here in the school we try to do as he does.

SITA: Widows, too? He doesn't love widows?

MISS SANSOM (*Taking the child's hand in her own*) Oh, yes, dear! He loves all little children, whether they are widows or not.

SITA: (*Approaching the picture and looking up at it in wonder*) I didn't know there was anybody that loved widows. No! Everyone beats us, and kicks us, and swears at us!

Tara puts out a finger toward the doll, and looks questioningly at Miss Sansom. Miss Sansom takes it up and hands it to her.

MISS SANSOM: Hold it a little while, dear, if you'd like to. And perhaps (*turning to Mother and Ayesha*) you would like to look at the books the girls have sent us from America.

Miss Sansom hands them books, and goes on putting desk in order. Ayesha's and Mother's expressions continue bewildered and intensely curious. Tara meantime holds the doll up carefully, turns it slowly around and then over and over; examines its shoes and hair; tips it cautiously to horizontal position.

TARA: (*Loudly, running to her mother and Ayesha*) It does! It does! It moves its eyes! That wasn't a fairy story.

Ayesha inspects it, and hands it to her mother and she gives it back to Tara, while others are talking.

LOCKI: Wasn't a single bit of it a fairy story! They don't like to have us tell lies here at school.

SITA: (*Looking around from the picture, at which she has still gazed with clasped hands*) Is there anybody in the world that doesn't tell lies?

LOCKI: (*Pointing to Miss Sansom*) She doesn't! Not ever.

Mother and Ayesha look up from their books and shake amazed heads.

TARA: (*Standing before the bird-cage, with the doll clasped tightly to her breast*) Do you hear that, Mother and Ayesha? And to think I'm to come to this place like Paradise—every day!

MISS SANSOM: (*Anxiously*) Every day? (*She looks inquiringly at Mother and Ayesha, who nod profoundly.*)

TARA: (*Joyously*) My father has said it! We never dreamed he would, but he has said it—if it didn't cost anything. He said he was sick of having all his women wailing around the zenana and weeping rivers of tears —and that anyway his child might have joy and knowledge if other women-children were found able to receive it.

MISS SANSOM: But——

SITA: And I can come, too! My mother-in-law beat me first time I asked, but I'm not much good for work anyway, now my back is so bad—so she doesn't care if I come. She doesn't care what I do, so long as it doesn't cost any money.

MISS SANSOM: (*Putting her head down in her hands*) Oh, children, how can I tell you? There is no room for you in the school. We can't manage to take care of another girl. Not one!

Tara, Sita, and Locki look at one another silently, with dazed, puzzled faces, then at the mother and Ayesha.

TARA: But Locki said you wanted girls. And my father —he has said yes. You don't mean—truly—that we cannot come?

MISS SANSOM: It takes a little money for every girl, dears. And I've used all there is, and all I could possibly squeeze out of my own pocket-book, and there isn't enough for another girl, not another one.

TARA: (*Her eyes wide*) But I can't! I tell you I can't go back there with nothing to do—nothing to do and nothing to look at. It will be worse than ever after seeing this! (*She waves her hand at the whole scene.*) I—can't!

SITA: Nor I. I thought I could stand the curses and the kicks, if I had this, part of the day. This—and—Him. (*She nods toward the picture, and finishes slowly.*) He cares about—widows.

LOCKI: (*After pressing her hands to her eyes*) Oh, Miss Teacher! I promised them. I thought surely—can't we squeeze up and manage somehow?

MISS SANSOM: (*Shaking her head slowly and sadly*) Not unless they could pay a little money, just enough to buy the things we would need for them.

Sita pulls her sari across her face and turns her back to the audience. Tara stares with a little hope at her mother, who shakes her head.

MOTHER: Alas, there has not been money to keep rice in our bowls and whole clothing on our shoulders. "It is fortunate that these foreigners are so rich—and so strangely generous." Those were the words of her father. "For I could not this year pay a single anna for the schooling. Do not ask it, for it cannot be."

Tara lays the doll slowly on the desk and sits down beside her mother, bowing her head on her knees. Ayesha holds out her arms and looks at her bracelets, then lifts her necklaces and weighs them in her hands.

AYESHA: (*To the mother*) I do not know what your son will say. But how can I see the little sister shut out in the cold and dark as we have been, when the door is open for her?

She pulls off most of the bracelets and necklaces and rises, carrying them in her two hands to Miss Sansom, while the mother stares in surprise.

AYESHA: Will you sell them and let the little one come into the brightness?

Mother rises quickly and interrupts her, taking off some of her own jewelry as she comes.

MOTHER: Your young thoughts speed past my old ones, wife-of-my-son. But let none say that your love could outrun mine. Take my jewels likewise, Memsahib. I know that they are no more than baubles, for we are poor folk, though high of birth. Is it enough?

MISS SANSOM: But will you suffer too greatly for this? Will—will your husbands——?

MOTHER: We can endure what we must, the wife-of-my-son and I. And I do not think we shall be made to suffer greatly. The father of Tara is tender of the child, even though shame will not let him show it; and my son will heed the words of his mother. Are the jewels enough?

MISS SANSOM: (*Looking down at the jewels*) I am sure they are enough—enough for a year for Tara, perhaps even more.

Tara, who has sat erect and wide-eyed, now rises and approaches them with clasped hands.

TARA: Is it true? It is real? And you would give your jewels for me? (*She fondles the hands of her mother and Ayesha.*) And I am to come here every day? Every day!

As she speaks, she turns with a start toward Sita, still standing with her back turned toward the audience, her arm across her face. Tara looks from the others to Sita and back.

TARA: But Sita? Can't Sita come, too?

MOTHER: I dare not take more jewels. And she is nothing to us. She is not even a Moslem. I am sorry, my daughter, but——

TARA: (*Fingering her sari, head down*) It would not be so glad for me—if Sita were shut out. It would be like eating my rice while another looked on and starved.

AYESHA: That is foolish talk, little one. Accept what is given and be glad. What is written on our foreheads will come to pass. Of course we are sorry for the girl. But as thy mother says—what is a Brahmin widow to a Moslem?

TARA: (*Brightening*) Memsahib, I know! I know! The jewels would bring enough to keep one girl in school a year at least? (*Miss Sansom nods.*) Then, why cannot Sita and I be the one girl?

MISS SANSOM: But what do you mean, Tara?

TARA: It is quite simple. Thus—(*She indicates the days on her fingers.*) On the first day of the week will come the Sita-half of the girl. (*She laughs gleefully.*) And after she has learned the lessons in the school, she will come to our home and teach them to the Tara-half also. On the second day of the week comes the Tara-half to the school, and afterward, within her mother's zenana, she will teach Sita likewise what she has learned. On the third day again the Sita-half—and so on, until we are two girls as wise as the sages—or even as Locki herself! Why, it may be that we could teach the reading and writing to Ayesha, too, though she is old to learn.

Sita twists round to gaze with amazement and hope.

AYESHA: Too old! What I would like is the embroidery and the singing.

MISS SANSOM: (*Quickly*) And you shall have it! I will come to your zenana myself to teach you. But the beautiful plan that Tara has suggested—are you willing that it should be so? It is a beautiful thought, a beautiful, generous thought.

AYESHA: But—a Brahmin widow——

LOCKI: The Memsahib came to teach Brahmin widows—and Moslems—and even sweepers. She came away from a house like those in the scrap-books——

MOTHER: I don't see what's come over the child.

LOCKI: It's the way He did. (*Nods toward the picture.*) *Sita has turned, and she comes closer and stands silent and tense.*

TARA: Mother! Ayesha! I beg of you, permit it to be so. I will be so good!

They look at one another.

MOTHER: (*Slowly*) Well, we might try it and see.

AYESHA: I suppose it's all right, if it's what you want to do.

Tara and Sita stretch out their hands to one another and clasp them, smiling, while the others gather in a group behind them, looking in a general way toward the audience.

MISS SANSOM: Don't be late, Tara, Sita! We shall be ready for you tomorrow—in the dark of the early morning.

TARA: (*Slowly, with wonder and joy*) To—school!

SITA: In at the door of happiness!